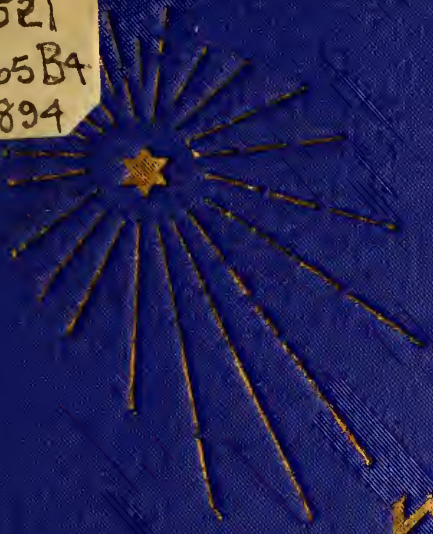


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# Bethlehem

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# Bethlehem



## A Christmas Poem



By

Henry S. Kirk

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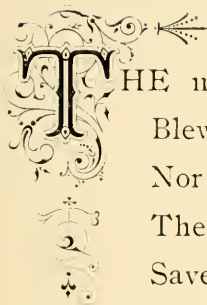


*I.*

*THE SHEPHERDS.*

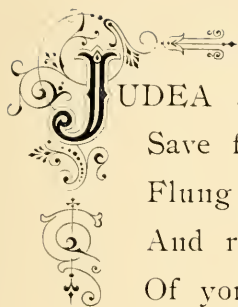






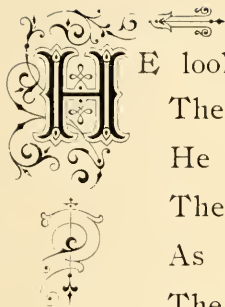
THE night was still: no wind nor sighing breeze  
Blew down the sloping hillsides through the trees,  
Nor stirred a leaf of olive in the grove;  
The earth was hushed in peace—as from above;  
Save for some dismal far-off jackal's cry  
That moaned awhile, then in its echo, die.  
Up in the heavens glowed the stars; the moon,  
In all her mellow fullness, calmly shone,  
And like a gracious queen enthroned in night  
She reigned serene, mid veils of misty light.





JUDEA slept: no trace of life was seen  
 Save for a fire, that with fitful gleam  
 Flung weird shadows 'gainst a sheepcot's wall,  
 And round the blaze, in easy reach of call  
 Of yonder silent sentinel, reposed  
 The forms of sleeping shepherds; midnight closed;  
 The watcher's task was o'er, he paused and turned  
 Towards the fire, when sudden round him burned  
 A wondrous light: the shepherd shook with fear,  
 While brighter grew the light, and yet more clear.

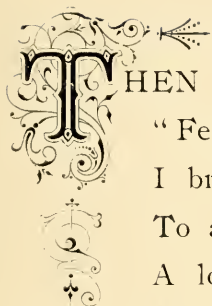




HE looked around him and could plainly see  
The glen and hills, the rocks and every tree ;  
He looked above, no star shone in the sky,  
The moon was gone, but there he saw on high,  
As from a heavenly window, streaming,  
The dazzling light; transfixed and almost seeming  
Lifeless, he called aloud with terror'd sound,  
“ Awake, awake, awake,” and from the ground  
The sleepers sprang, but at the blinding light  
They fell upon the earth o’ercome with fright.







HEN spoke a voice, in tones like liquid gold,

“Fear not,” their hearts swelled quickly, “for behold

I bring you good tidings which shall be

To all people, great joy;” and there they see

A lovely youth arrayed in dazzling white,

Above his brow a star hung, far more bright

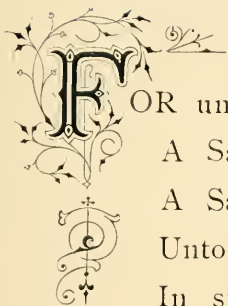
Than brilliant Hesperus. Their fear now fled,

And in their hearts with simple faith they said:

God’s glory is about us. And again

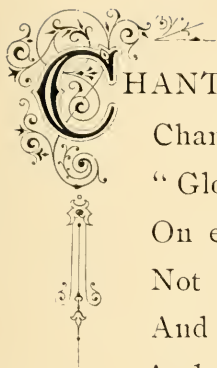
The angel spoke in even gladder strain.





FOR unto you this very day is born  
A Saviour, in David's holy town,  
A Saviour, Christ the Lord, and this shall be  
Unto you a sign: the infant you shall see  
In swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."  
No more then said the holy stranger  
But yet he stayed, and all around him grew  
The glowing light, now turned to roseate hue,  
And in the sky, with flashing wings, they see  
Myriad angels, chanting in glad ecstasy.





HANTING in unison, in gladness and glee

Chanting a sweet strain triumphantly :

“Glory to God in the highest, and peace

On earth, good will towards men.” They cease

Not once, but many times their hymn prolong

And echoes scatter sweetly from the song

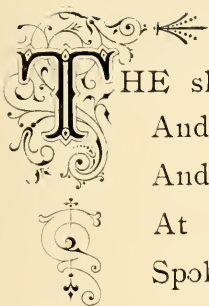
And echo o'er again. The angel spread

His shining wings and vanished overhead,

But yet they heard, though slow it fainter grew

The chorus sweet, 'till last it faded too.





THE shepherds at each other gazed with awe  
And spoke in hushèd tones of what they saw,  
And of the wondrous words the angel said ;  
At last one of them, looking overhead,  
Spoke solemnly, " Did not the angel say  
The Christ is born, and born this very day,  
And in our Bethlehem ; is it not so ?  
For it is David's city. Then let us go  
And worship him." And quitting flocks and all  
They went to seek the Christ, their Lord, their All.



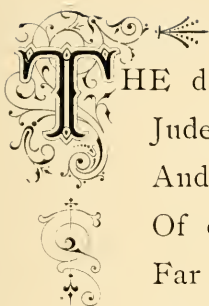


*II.*

*BIRTH OF THE SAVIOUR.*

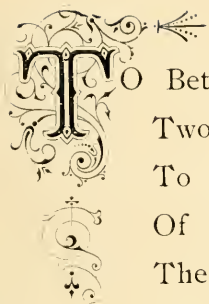






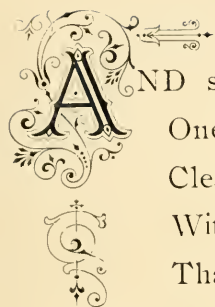
THE day was done, and slowly in the west  
 Judea's sun was sinking low to rest,  
 And o'er the top of Gedor cast a glow  
 Of deep'ning crimson. The twilight fadings grow  
 Far in the east, and with their waning light  
 Throw darkning shadows, heralds of the night,  
 O'er Bethlehem. Fair Bethlehem, set in  
 Mid scenes of beauty; city of the King,  
 Of David, Juda's pride; the sun's last ray  
 Kisses thy walls with love, then fades away.





O Bethlehem this winter's eve there come  
 Two travellers, who haste e'er day is done  
 To reach the inn: and one of them, a man,  
 Of stately mein, with eager eyes does scan  
 The roadway through the town—a princely form  
 Tall and erect, his liquid eyes, so warm,  
 With tender friendship shone; and by his side  
 Upon a patient animal, does ride  
 A woman veiled, but see, her veil falls low,  
 Her face is clear, lit by the sunset's glow.





AND such a face—no mortal ever knew

One like before. Her eyes were deep and blue,  
Clear as a cloudless sky; the stars at night  
With lesser lustre shine, with dimmer light  
Than those soft eyes. Her face, of perfect mold,  
Was wondrous fair and sweet; and like fine gold  
Spun out, her long hair fell all unconfined  
Adown her back, and in the gentle wind  
Rippled softly. There ne'er was angel face  
Nor form, so lovely nor so blest with grace.







URPASSING fair, by right, for it is she

Who is the mother of the Christ, to be :

'Tis Mary, and her soul's exceeding grace

Is greater than all else. They reach the place

Of rest, they stop, and Joseph, for 'tis he,

Enters, but soon returns, and plain to see

With disappointment weighed, 'tis true not there

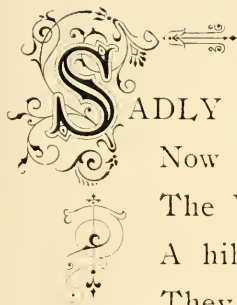
Is room for them ; it seems as though nowhere

They may find rest. At last he leads the way

Out of the town, out in the twilight gray.







SADLY they wander on, the dying day

Now fading fast has almost died away,

The Virgin fainter grows, but soon they see

A hillside cavern—here their rest shall be.

They haste, they reach the place, they enter in,

The cave is cold, 'tis full of shadows dim.

It is a stable, for against the wall

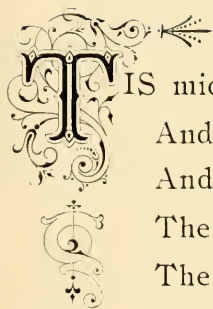
Are straw-filled mangers, meant for cattle stall.

Here is their rest, they raise their hearts above

With grateful prayers for His protecting love.

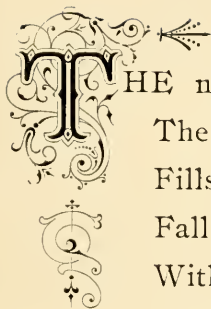


\* \* \* \*



IS midnight hour, when sudden comes a light  
And fills the cave, 'tis wondrous clear and bright ;  
And hark, the walls resound with melody  
The angels sing, they sing with ecstasy,  
The very air with gladness shakes, and well,  
For Christ is born, as midnight hour fell,  
His birth a miracle ; and o'er him, low,  
The Virgin Mother kneels, and as the glow  
Her eyes are clear, they beam with tender grace  
The infant smiles and looks up in her face.

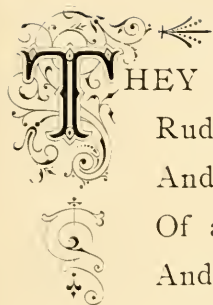




THE night wears on, the angels' song is o'er,  
The light is gone, and quietude once more  
Fills all the place: the pale moon's silv'ry glow  
Falls on the ground. Now through the opening low,  
With hesitating step and slow advance,  
Some men approach, and with one glance  
At the new born child, they prostrate there  
And worship long—'tis the shepherds, and the prayer  
Their glad hearts echo, is of joy profound,  
Of joy and gladness, for the Christ is found.

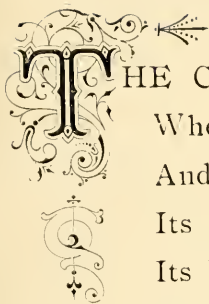






THEY offer gifts with humbleness sincere,  
Rude offerings, but held by them most dear;  
And then they rise — to Mary tell the tale  
Of all that passed far off in their lone vale,  
And when they told of all they heard and saw,  
They go their way, o'ercome with awe;  
O'ercome with awe and gladness, for they sing  
In rapture of the Christ, the new born King,  
And echoes scatter sweetly from the song  
And lingering, die, as though they'd fain prolong.





HE Christ is born. O happy midnight hour  
When thou did'st break, then fled the demon's power,  
And in the night proud Comus' temple fell,  
Its oracle destroyed, no more to tell  
Its breathings false; then in thy hour bloomèd fair,  
Engaddis' vines, and filled was all the air  
With wondrous mystery. The Christ is born,  
The Saviour of mankind; then broke the morn,  
The joyous dawn of life anew, of love,  
The first ray of the light of life above.

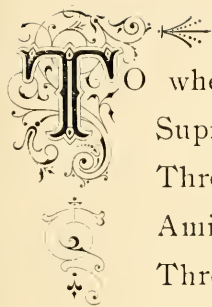


*III.*

*THE COMING OF THE MAGI.*



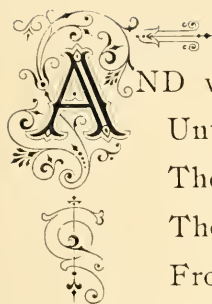




O where Jerusalem in splendor stands  
 Supremely fair, there came from far-off lands  
 Three travellers in pomp and splendor rare,  
 Amid a train of slaves and trappings fair,  
 Three men, majestic and of noble mein:  
 They came to seek the Christ, for they had seen  
 Far in the east his star—a wondrous light  
 That led them on and on through day and night,  
 'Cross many desert wastes, through changing clime,  
 Until it led them to fair Palestine.

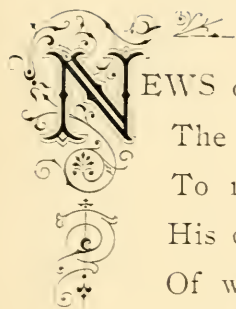






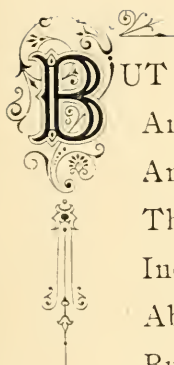
AND when at last they had come nearly nigh  
Unto Jerusalem, far in the sky  
The star did vanish, but they entered in  
The city's gate, and for the new-born King,  
From everyone, did question eagerly;  
But no one knew of him they came to see.  
The Magi wondered, but repaired to rest  
And on the morrow to renew their quest.  
Repose they found, and as in peace they slept  
Dreams of the Christ-child through their slumbers crept.





NEWS of the strangers and for whom they sought,  
 The new born King of Juda, soon were brought  
 To mighty Herod, who in rage did seek  
 His councillors, and bade them to him speak  
 Of when the Jews' messiah would be born.  
 They searched the records, and they named the town  
 As that of Bethlehem, in Juda's land,  
 And that his coming soon would be at hand  
 For now the last of Daniel's weeks were o'er.  
 This was his time to come—they said no more.





UT Herod in great anger, swore that he  
And he alone, Judea's King would be;  
And with deceitful cunning did invite  
The strangers three before him that he might  
Inquire closely all that they did know  
About the Christ; then kindly bade them go,  
But asked them that they might return his way  
To tell him all, that he might homage pay  
Unto the child; and they, suspecting not  
His ill design, agreed, and then set out.





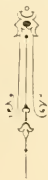
UT scarcely had they gone their way afar  
When in the heavens soon appeared their star;  
With joyful hearts they followed in the way  
The light led on, till last ere close of day  
The star stood still, its bright rays pointing down  
Upon a rocky hillside near the town:  
And coming near, they see a cavern low  
They enter in, 'tis lit up with a glow —  
And there they find the child, their search is o'er.  
And prostrate low, the infant they adore.



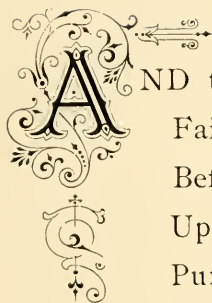




THEY worshipped long, sincerely and profound,  
Then slow with reverence rose up from the ground  
And went without, but quickly did return,  
Each bearing in his arms a golden urn,  
And to the child they offer precious gold,  
This as an earthly King, and then behold  
They offer myrrh and incense, as a sign  
Of adoration to a God divine.  
As King of men, they offer glittering store.  
But as a God, with fervent hearts, adore.

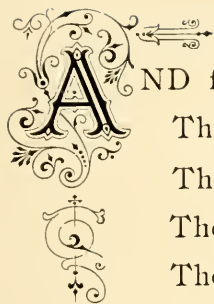






AND then they turn to Mary, whom they found  
Fair as the morn, and bowing to the ground  
Before her, pray that God's grace might ever rest  
Upon her, then leave the cave, and in the west  
Pursue their way to Jericho, to tell  
King Herod of the child. But when night fell  
And as they slept, they heard an angel speak  
Of Herod's evil will. They did not seek  
The King, but as the angel did command  
They turned their way to Persia's lovely strand.





AND far away in Bethlehem's lone cave

The Christ-child lay, the Christ who came to save ;

There in his lowly cot where humbly prayed

The shepherds rude, and where the wise men laid

Their precious gifts and worshipped so profound,

There in that cell who's walls did once resound

With wondrous melody — the infant slept ;

And as the morning gray beams softly crept

Far in the eastern sky, then broke the dawn,

The gladdest of all days — the Christmas morn.

























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